UNITED NATIONS

TD

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.
LIMITED

TD/B/43/SC.2/L.3
18 October 1996

Original : ENGLISH

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Forty-third session
Geneva, 7 October 1996
Agenda Item 10

Sessional Committee II

REVIEW OF UNCTAD'S PUBLICATION POLICY

Chairman's summary and draft agreed conclusions

A. Chairman's summary

1. The Committee had an extensive discussion on UNCTAD's publication policy on the basis of the secretariat document "Review of UNCTAD's publication policy" (TD/B/43/CRP.4). It was noted that the discussion was taking place in the context of three parallel processes affecting UNCTAD:

(a) The review of publications agreed on at UNCTAD IX and currently being carried out by the Trade and Development Board;

(b) The ongoing review by the General Assembly of the UN-wide publications policy;

(c) The review by the task force set up by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD as part of the efficiency review being conducted throughout the United Nations.[1]

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1 Terms of reference are contained in the Progress Report of the Efficiency Board "UN 21", Sales No. E.96.I.28.

GE.96-52012

2. There was general agreement that the review should be considered in the broader context of improving UNCTAD's overall communication and information policy. In this context, delegations held the view that the Secretary-General's initiative in setting up a task force on publications as part of the efficiency review should provide a useful basis for the finalization of this process. They recognized the generally high quality of UNCTAD publications.

3. Proposals raised in the Committee by individual delegations or spokespersons for different groupings included, inter alia, steps to increase the sales portion of distribution, taking into account the sales price and cost of specific publications in relation to that of similar publications; cooperation with other international organizations in the gathering of statistics; the feasibility of using environment-friendly raw materials and production processes based on a cost-benefit analysis; the elimination of content overlapping through streamlining of UNCTAD publications.

4. Some delegations held the view that greater efforts needed to be made by the Board in prioritizing and rationalizing UNCTAD's publication programme. They suggested that the secretariat should play a pro-active role in a priority-setting exercise. However, other delegations felt that the priorities should be set by member States in the various intergovernmental bodies responsible for the substance dealt with in the relevant publications and that, furthermore, prioritization in publications may not be necessary or practical.

B. Draft agreed conclusions

(i) The Committee agreed that its discussion was the beginning of a process in the implementation of the decisions taken at Midrand and that the main purpose of the review was to increase the quality and impact of UNCTAD publications and to make the best possible use of existing resources.

(ii) The Committee endorsed the approach set out in document TD/B/43/CRP.4, under which the Secretary-General of UNCTAD would review the report of the Task Force on Publications, to be completed by March 1997, and subsequently report to the Trade and Development Board. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD was requested to make a progress report to the Board at its next executive session.

(iii) On the basis of its discussion, the Committee agreed to request the Secretary-General that, in its review, the secretariat task force should take into account the following factors:

(a) The need to develop a coherent communication and information policy and to improve marketing and distribution;

(b) The need to make the best possible use of modern communication technology, such as expanded use of electronic dissemination, expanding UNCTAD's presence on the Internet, and using Internet for inter-expert consultation and the review of documentation, as well as for communication with Geneva-based missions. At the same time, the situation of those developing countries that do not yet have access to this technology needs to be taken care of;

(c) The need to develop suitable criteria for measuring feedback, including the regular checking of mailing lists, reader response, sales figures and a systematic review of media coverage;

(d) The ongoing need for detailed data on work months, print runs, printing costs, place of printing, and distributed copies, both free of charge and sold, for all recurrent publications; information for 1996 will be made available at the resumed 28th session of the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget, and detailed estimates for subsequent years will be made available to the Working Party at the first meeting of the 29th session and in the progress report mentioned in paragraph (ii) of the agreed conclusions;

(e) In the interest of making the best possible use of resources, the feasibility of printing and translating externally, including in developing countries, whenever it is economically viable;

(f) The availability and the need for timely distribution of documents in all the UN official languages, as well as the quality of translations, taking into account that availability of publications in these languages is a very important factor in maximizing dissemination and impact.

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Sessional Committee II

Improving the participation of developing countries' experts in UNCTAD meetings, including the question of financing their participation

Draft agreed conclusions

1. The Sessional Committee had an exchange of views on the question of improving the participation of developing countries' experts in UNCTAD meetings, including the question of financing their participation. The discussion included the issues contained in document TD/B/43/CRP.3. There was general agreement that the expert meetings called for by "A Partnership for Growth and Development" needed the active participation of experts from every interested region in order to benefit from a higher level of technical expertise. It was recognized that the costs involved might cause problems to developing countries, in particular to the least developed among them, and that measures needed to be taken to facilitate the participation of developing country experts, including by providing a predictable and stable funding basis.

2. The options provided in document TD/B/43/CRP.3 were reviewed in the course of the discussion. Delegations agreed that many questions still needed to be clarified, including the issues of long-term funding and the possible use of the regular budget for this purpose. It was agreed, however, to take a number of measures immediately, on a provisional basis, in order to give effect to the decisions taken at Midrand. It was also felt necessary to gain some experience with the operation of the new intergovernmental machinery before taking any long-term decisions on this matter.

3. As a concrete measure on a trial basis, the Sessional Committee agreed to recommend to the Trade and Development Board that:

(i) It request the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to establish, subsequent to consultations with member States, a trust fund the purpose of which is to enhance the participation of developing country experts in UNCTAD meetings. The meetings referred to are those described in paragraph 114 of "A Partnership for Growth and Development" which also states specifically that: "Experts should be nominated by Governments, should have proven experience and would serve expert meetings in their personal capacities". The Secretary-General should base his decisions regarding the enhancement of the participation of developing country experts on the principle of equitable geographical representation and beneficiary needs;

(ii) It request the Secretary-General to start the fund-raising process and the activities of the trust fund as soon as possible;

(iii) It request the Secretary-General to explore avenues to increase developing country expert participation in addition to the financing of travel and per diem costs. In particular, recourse to modern methods of communication should be borne in mind;

(iv) It request the Secretary-General to consider also the possibility of enhancing further the participation of developing country experts through the judicious use of his prerogative to invite experts contributing to the work of the secretariat and enable them to participate also in expert meetings;

(v) It request the Secretary-General to present to the Board as soon as possible a report on the decision taken at Midrand that: "With a view to strengthening UNCTAD's capabilities, including inter alia technical cooperation, ways and means should be explored within the existing financial rules and regulations of the United Nations to reallocate a part of the savings resulting from improved overall cost-effectiveness";

(vi) It assess, at its next regular session, after adequate preparations, the effectiveness of these measures and their impact on improving developing country expert participation based on a report prepared by the Secretary-General in this regard;

(vii) It decide, at its next regular session, in the light of the above assessment and the financial situation of the fund, whether or not to pursue elements of the first option outlined in TD/B/43/CRP.3.